

11/23/22 Wednesday

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'This Erection is About the People': Herschel Walker's On-Air Gaffe Goes Viral
By - Mary Manley

Walker is a former football running back who is campaigning in Georgia as a Republican nominee for US Senate. The candidate, who is running on an extreme anti-abortion platform, has become a controversial topic as two women have come forward with claims the candidate pressured them into, and paid for their abortions.

US Senate candidate Herschel Walker is going viral... well, not him but a gaffe that the former athlete made on television while seated between Senators Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC).

As it happens, when asked to comment about the recent criticism he had been receiving, Walker said: "First of all this election is more than Herschel Walker, this erection is about the people."

And just like that, social media went wild with Walker's verbal slip-up.

Walker's gaffe is made even more unfortunate by its timing: one day earlier the second woman who had accused Walker of pressuring her into having an abortion renewed her accusations after the Senate candidate dismissed her claims.

The woman has backed up the allegation with letters, audio recordings and pages from her personal diary, all of which Walker has denied. The pair were allegedly in a relationship for six years while he was playing for the Dallas Cowboys, and paid for her abortion in 1993.

"I'm done with this foolishness. I've already told people this is a lie and I'm not going to entertain it," Walker had said in response to the latest claim.

The first woman who alleged Herschel paid for her abortion came forward in early October, noting Walker had paid for the abortion when the pair were dating in 2009. The first woman also came forward with evidence including a \$575 receipt for the abortion, a signed \$700 check from Walker, and a card from the Senate candidate which read "get well."

"I just can't with the hypocrisy anymore," the first accuser said when asked why she had come forward with information that contradicted Walker's strict ant-abortion policies. "We all deserve better."

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Some Bills Are Apparently Going Unpaid by Elon Musk's New Twitter
By - Mary Manley

Musk has been on a campaign to slash costs at his new company since he bought the social media platform for \$44 billion in late October. Musk laid off about 3,700 people with a goal to save money. He then demanded his remaining employees to work “long hours at high intensity” or quit, many of his employees did just that.

Elon Musk, 51, is shirking some bills at Twitter, insiders say. The new owner of the social media company has failed to answer calls by travel vendors who say the company is in their debt, and owe hundreds of thousands of dollars in travel invoices for the company’s former executives. Musk has excused himself from paying the bills, he argues, because the services were authorized by Twitter’s former management. His staff have ignored calls from the travel companies, insiders [said](#).

The billionaire entrepreneur has been trying to cut costs at his new company, which he acquired at the hefty price of \$44 billion. Advertisers started to flee the platform following Musk’s acquisition, which further damaged plans to save money at the company.

Fourteen of Twitter’s top 50 advertisers stopped advertising on the platform in just a few weeks following Musk’s takeover. The abandonment of advertisers will ultimately damage Twitter’s finances, as last year 90% of Twitter’s \$5 billion in revenue came from advertising, according to [filings](#).

However, Musk’s layoffs weren’t of his own devising though, as the mogul had brought on colleagues from his other business ventures to look at Twitter’s books. Among the newcomers are Antonia Garcias, a former director of Tesla; Jared Birchall, the head of Musk’s family office; and Steve Davis, who heads the Boring Company. His confidantes suggested mass cuts to the platform’s new owner in order to rescue the tech platform from a sinking hole.

After the dismissal of some 7,500 employees, Musk demanded remaining employees to either work “long hours at high intensity” or else lose their jobs. In the end, Musk’s ultimatum backfired and many employees—more than Musk and his team expected—ended up quitting. According to one news outlet, Twitter’s core services group was left with just one person in its entire [department](#).

The recent chaotic back and forth at Twitter HQ also saw Musk inform staff that the earlier remote work stance would be eased somewhat, with reports indicating that unsuccessful attempts were made to poach some “critical” members of staff with \$100,000 raises in order to not leave.

One news source reported that as of Monday, less than half of Twitter’s remaining 4,000 employees decided to stay at the company. So, in a matter of weeks, Twitter’s workforce of 7,000 employees shrunk to just 2,700 full-time employees.

New Guidances Under Twitter 2.0

Newly [obtained](#) company emails have also recently revealed that the social media giant was now implemented stricter rules in regards to employee travel costs.

Chief among the regulations are: Travel for Twitter staff must be for “business-critical purposes,” and must be approved by managers; and senior vice presidents and CEO staff are allowed a budget of \$20,000 for work trips, while vice presidents can spend \$10,000, directors are allowed \$5,000, and a manager is allowed just \$500.

Musk also slashed perks for Twitter employees such as WiFi for employee’s homes, costs associated with “wellness,” training and development, activities such as Camp Twitter, free lunches, and a temporary allowance for daycare costs.

"Allowances will be reevaluated over time and may be added back when the company's financial situation improves," the email noted.

According to [sources](#), in early November Musk warned employees in a meeting that the company was running in a negative cash flow of several billion dollars, and Musk had apparently sold \$4 billion in Tesla shares to "save" the company. He also mentioned bankruptcy at the meeting.

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China's Eclipse - Cartoon
By - Ted Rall

The China National Space Administration (CNSA) has made great progress in their mission to get to the moon. So great, in fact, Wu Weiren, the chief designer of China's Lunar Exploration Program told Chinese media on Monday that they have plans to build a station on the moon by the 2028.

The station is being built in a partnership with Russia and is expected to be up and running on the lunar south pole by 2028. The US also has plans to land its Artemis 3 mission in that same location with a scheduled launch in late 2025 using a SpaceX lander, with plans to build a similar station over the next decade. Their deadline for the Artemis Base Camp was set for 2030, but a leaked [document](#) has suggested the actual timeline is 2034.

"We are currently developing a new energy system where nuclear energy can provide high-power and long-time supply. And the communication facility can achieve communication between the moon and the Earth, or with other planets such as Mars," [Wu](#) said.

[China's](#) base is also expected to hold a lander, hopper, orbiter, and a rover that will transport astronauts around the moon. The launchpad could also help future missions in space. Chang'e 7 and 8 will launch in 2026, and after landing will begin to explore the south pole for an area that can be used as a foundation for its station. The US, meanwhile, is also aiming to power their station with nuclear energy, and sent the Orion capsule into lunar orbit earlier this month. The US now has its eyes on China, as the country has made significant progress in its space race over the past few years. NASA Administrator Bill Nelson warned in July that China's landing on the moon is a message to other nations, suggesting: "It's ours now and you stay out," which the Chinese foreign ministry has denied.

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M23 Rebels Say Rwanda-DR Congo Ceasefire Deal Does Not Affect Them
By - Mary Manley

The rebel group announced that they were not concerned by the call for ceasefire during the mini summit in Luanda and called for a "direct dialogue" with the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo, as they were not present during the summit.

On Thursday the March 23 Movement (M23) rebel group announced that they were "not concerned" about the joint mini summit in Luanda, Angola, during which leaders in the East African region asked the rebel group to halt attacks and withdraw from occupied areas.

It was the first ever joint mini [summit](#) between the East African Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) in Luanda, to focus on the Congo crisis.

"M23 has seen the document on social media... There was nobody in the summit (from M23) so it doesn't really concern us," Lawrence Kanyuka, a political spokesman for the M23 movement, told AFP.

"Normally when there is a ceasefire it is between the two warring sides," he added.

The Luanda summit concluded with the decision to cease hostilities in the DRC beginning on Friday evening by setting up a disarmament and cantonment of the M23 in Congolese territory under the control of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF).

"During the disengagement and withdrawal of the M23 to its initial positions, Kenya will deploy its contingents to Goma, then Bunagana, Rutshuru, Kiwandja," the mini summit communiqué reads. Bunagana, Kiwandja, and some sections of Rutshuru are currently under M23 control.

"The cessation of hostilities in general, and in particular, the attacks by the M23 against the FARDC and Monusco as of Friday 25 November at 6pm," the communiqué added, referring to the UN [peacekeeping mission](#) in the DRC, as well as any other foreign armed groups on Congolese soil.

Should M23 refuse to withdraw their troops, the east African regional force will be deployed to force them to leave.

"If tomorrow at 6:00 pm (1600 GMT), or in the morning, the government doesn't attack us, we will still be there," said Kanyuka, who added that if they don't, the rebel group will choose to defend themselves.

"We are always ready for a direct dialogue with the Congolese government to resolve the root causes of conflicts," he said.

M23 is a group that was formed out of the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) which was a rebel group fighting the DRC government from 2006 to 2009, both groups have formed claims that the Congolese Tutsi and other ethnic communities in north and south Kivu are suffering from [discrimination](#).

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UK Nurses to Strike For Two Days Next Month
By - Mary Manley

Nurses across Britain will be going on strike for two separate days next month, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) announced on Friday. The strike across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland by members of the RCN comes as offers to talk about increased pay for nursing staff have not been addressed by ministers, says the union.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has announced a strike for two separate days next month, making it the first strike in 106 years. The strike is expected to last for 12 hours on each day. The strike follows a record number of National Health Service (NHS) members quitting in droves: in September it was reported by a British news outlet that in the past year more than [40,000 healthcare workers](#) stepped away from their roles.

"Nursing staff have had enough of being taken for granted, enough of low pay and unsafe staffing levels, enough of not being able to give our patients the care they deserve," said Pat Cullen, the General Secretary and Chief Executive of the RCN.

Nurses are exhausted after a global pandemic exacerbated pre-existing issues in their field of work including: low-pay, lack of safety, long hours, and disrespect. Inflation has worsened the issue of low wages for many occupations, with postal workers, school and university staff, and rail [unions](#) also striking for higher compensations.

The first nurses' strike will occur on December 15, during the same week when rail strikes by the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union will take place. December 15 will also be the second day of a 48-hour walkout by postal workers. The second nurses' strike will take place on December 20.

"I was completely exhausted and just demoralized," said Leena [Myllynen](#), 32, who left the NHS after she was unable to pay her bills. "I was never, ever able to make it through to payday, even when I worked extra hours."

While the NHS, which is one of the world's largest employers, is expected to receive £3.3 billion for 2023 to 2024, and 2024 to 2025, as promised by Chancellor Jeremy [Hunt](#), experts are saying that won't be enough to keep their beloved system from sinking, in fact: it's just half of what the institution actually needs.

"The NHS warned it needed more money to cope with the impact of inflation on its costs," said Nigel Edwards, the chief executive of the independent thinktank Nuffield Trust, who adds that the chancellor's allotted amount will not account for the £2.5 billion worth of inflation that is stretching the system to its breaking point. "Today's autumn statement has provided much-needed extra cash from April over the next two years, but this is only around half of what the NHS had warned last month would likely be needed."

Another thing the NHS needs to stay afloat? Workers. And those workers---the ones who haven't quit, at least---are demanding a 19.2% pay raise that would cost £10 billion per year with £1,400 in raises per nurse for this year, according to the British Health Secretary Steve Barclay, who warns that the nurses' demands are not "affordable".

"These are challenging times for everyone and the economic circumstances mean the RCN's demands... are not affordable," [Barclay](#)said.

Barclay is right about one thing: Britain is currently facing a cost-of-living crisis with inflation reaching 11.1% in October, which is a 41-year-high for the country that has recently put in the hands of Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party [Rishi Sunak](#), a former banker who is the first person of color to lead Britain.

The NHS also has a backlog of 7 million patients on its waiting list for hospital treatments. When Myllynen's partner, for example, experienced severe pneumonia and blood clotting he ended up sleeping on the floor of an emergency room for 12 hours because no beds were available, despite him being an [NHS doctor](#).

"Why on Earth is the Health Secretary refusing to negotiate with nurses?" said Wes [Streeting](#), the opposition Labour Party's health spokesperson. "Patients already can't get treated on time, strike action is the last thing they need, yet the Government is letting this happen."

"I am sorry we are having to do this," said Shaun [Williams](#), a hospital nurse who is prepared to strike though he finds it to be upsetting. "But we are doing it for the right reasons, we are doing it for patient safety. You are running on reserves most days. We do not have enough staff and because of the lack of nurses, patients are at risk."

"Unless we pay nurses more we are not going to attract people or keep people," he added.

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Trump's Campaign Does Damage Control After He Dines With a White Supremacist and Kanye West

By - Mary Manley

The former president said he "knew nothing about" West's friends whom the rapper had brought to dinner, including the white supremacist Nick Fuentes. In a video which he released to Twitter, West has told his own version of the dinner, saying: "Trump is really impressed with Nick Fuentes".

The campaign team working for Donald Trump is doing damage control this week after the former president had hosted an accidental dinner with denounced rapper Kanye West, white supremacist Nick Fuentes, and two others including Karen Giorno, who was the director of Trump's 2016 campaign in Florida.

"This past week, Kanye West called me to have dinner at Mar-a-Lago. Shortly thereafter, he unexpectedly showed up with three of his friends, whom I knew nothing about," Trump said in a statement via his Truth Social platform on Friday. "We had dinner on Tuesday evening with many members present on the back patio. The dinner was quick and uneventful. They then left for the airport."

Trump failed to acknowledge that he did, in fact, know Giorno whom three sources told an American news outlet Trump would have recognized in person.

Fuentes, 24, who is helping to advise West in his second presidential campaign---yes, he's also [running](#)---is an outspoken antisemite, Holocaust denier, and unabashed racist who uses hate speech in his podcast, and has publicly demanded that Jews leave the country and Black neighborhoods be placed under martial law, an American [news outlet](#) reported.

"This is a f***** nightmare," said one longtime Trump adviser who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of angering the former president. "If people are looking at [Florida Governor Ron] DeSantis to run against Trump, here's another reason why."

Trump is undoubtedly attempting to distance himself from the company he shared dinner with as the former president, who is running for his second term in office, is already a deeply controversial figure. He recently had his [Twitter account](#) reinstated by owner Elon Musk who bought the social media service for \$44 billion last month, after Trump had his Twitter account suspended following the January 6 riots at the US Capitol in 2021. His account posed a risk of inciting violence, the company said at the time.

According to a source, which was corroborated by West himself, the dinner grew heated after West asked Trump if he would be his running mate.

"I think the thing that Trump was most perturbed about, me asking him to be my vice president. I think that was like lower on the list of things that caught him off guard. It was the fact that I walked in with intelligence," West revealed in a nearly two-minute clip on his Twitter account (which was also recently reinstated after being shut down for antisemitic comments).

"So Trump is really impressed with Nick Fuentes, and Nick Fuentes, unlike so many of the lawyers of so many people that he was left with on his 2020 campaign, he's actually a loyalist," said West. "And when all the lawyers said, 'forget it, Trump's done,' there are loyalists running up in the White House, right? And my question would be, why, when you had the chance, did you not free the January Sixers?"

Trump and West are both deeply controversial Republican presidential candidates. Trump is the first president in US history to be impeached twice, he has been subpoenaed to give a testimony under oath for his involvement in the [January 6 riots](#) on Capitol Hill in 2021, and his Mar-a-Lago residence was raided this year by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) after he wrongfully took and concealed classified documents as some sort of ['ego play'](#).

West, who is a rapper, fashion designer, and mogul, has been sparking controversies for years, but more recently showcased a "White Lives Matter" t-shirt which he designed for Paris Fashion Week this year, and after backlash doubled down on the statement. Following that scandal and after a series of bombshell interviews the rapper wrote a Tweet attacking the Jewish community. His comments then cost him his [billionaire](#) status after major fashion brands like Adidas, Gap Inc., Balenciaga, Vogue, and others decided to drop him.

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'The Drug War Is a Game': Disgraced Agent Reveals Web of Corruption at Heart of DEA
By - Wyatt Reed

Shocking testimony from a DEA agent who was busted after spending years embezzling huge sums and participating in debauchorous sex parties with prostitutes reveals the depth of the rot at the core of the United States' premier 'anti-drug' agency.

The former star agent convicted for receiving over a million dollars in kickbacks while working for the Drug Enforcement Administration has revealed that dozens of other DEA officials, federal prosecutors, agency informants, and cartel members bilked taxpayers out of millions while going on luxury good shopping sprees, attending sporting events, and partying with prostitutes across the world as well.

"We had free access to do whatever we wanted," José Irizarry reportedly [told the AP](#) before beginning a 12-year federal prison sentence this week. "We would generate money pick-ups in places we wanted to go. And once we got there it was about drinking and girls."

As Irizarry explained, "The drug war is a game. ... It was a very fun game that we were playing." "You can't win an unwinnable war – [the] DEA knows this and the agents know this," Irizarry said. "There's so much dope leaving Colombia. And there's so much money. We know we're not making a difference."

Instead, the former agent explained, he and his colleagues made the most of the situation by cashing in on their access and informants by securing bribes and falsifying official records. A release published by the US Department of Justice (DoJ) in the wake of Irizarry's 2021 conviction on 19 counts – including money laundering and fraud – insisted his actions "are in no way a reflection of the overwhelming majority of special agents."

"It was too outlandish for them to believe this is actually happening," Irizarry explained to the outlet. "The indictment paints a picture of me, the corrupt agent that did this entire scheme. But it doesn't talk about the rest of [the] DEA. I wasn't the mastermind."

Indeed, the FBI's ongoing investigations into Irizarry's former colleagues indicates the US government believes corruption in the DEA is more widespread than they've been letting on in public.

All told, the DoJ has reportedly interviewed over 20 current and former DEA agents and prosecutors as a result of Irizarry's information, including his former partner, as well as multiple prosecutors who attended his parties.

The latest scandal comes as the administration has been repeatedly plagued by shocking accusations of widespread corruption. In May, a former DEA agent [was sentenced](#) to over 11 years for taking thousands of dollars in bribes from a narcotics trafficker. Just a week later, additional former DEA agents [were charged](#) with accepting tens of thousands of dollars in exchange for leaking information to an accused drug dealer's defense team.

The latest AP investigation indicates the rot may well go all the way to the core of the apple. "Every year, the DEA launders tens of millions of dollars on behalf of the world's most-violent drug cartels through shell companies," the publication noted.

Many countries and governments targeted by the DEA have long insisted that nominally anti-drug operations carried out by the US are a pretext to impose its preferred foreign policy on the rest of the world.

"For the CIA and DEA, the so-called 'war on drugs' is an excuse to attack progressive and anti-imperialist governments," former Bolivian President Evo Morales, who was overthrown in a 2019 US-backed coup d'état after kicking the DEA out of the country, wrote in a 2021 tweet. "It is a cover to cover up their geopolitical interests."

The sentiment was confirmed by a spokesperson for Mexico's Chihuahua state government who claimed the CIA and the DEA "don't fight drug traffickers" but rather "try to manage the drug trade" instead.

"It's like pest control companies, they only control," Guillermo Terrazas Villanueva, the spokesman for Chihuahua, declared in [an interview](#) with Al Jazeera in 2012. "If you finish off the pests, you are out of a job. If they finish the drug business, they finish their jobs."

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Colombian President Says He's Calling on Biden to End Assange Prosecution

By - Wyatt Reed

In a subsequent message on social media, President Petro wrote he would "ask President Biden... not to charge a journalist just for telling the truth."

Colombian President Gustavo Petro met with a delegation representing jailed WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange at the presidential palace Monday for a discussion which also included Foreign Minister Álvaro Leyva.

"I met with WikiLeaks spokespersons to support the global fight for the freedom of journalist Julian Assange," Petro explained Monday in a post published on Twitter. "I will ask President Biden along with other Latin American presidents not to charge a journalist just for telling the truth," the Colombian president wrote.

WikiLeaks editor Kristinn Hrafnsson said in a subsequent [release](#) that "President Petro and Foreign Minister Alvaro Duran [have] shown a clear commitment to support the fight for Julian Assange's freedom, and strongly recognized the implications for press freedom worldwide that Assange's extradition would set."

Hrafnsson lauded Colombia's top officials for having "pledged to assist in getting other leaders in the region to follow Colombia's position and to collectively and individually urge the Biden administration to call off the proceedings against Assange and grant him his long overdue freedom."

Assange has been languishing in Britain's notorious Belmarsh prison since 2019, and is facing a potential maximum sentence of 175 years in a US Supermax facility if he's extradited to the US to face trial on espionage charges. In June, the UK's then-Home secretary, Priti Patel, approved the extradition – a decision which Assange's legal team announced they were appealing in August.

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has also been a [strong advocate](#) for the WikiLeaks founder's freedom, telling reporters in July that if Assange was taken "to the United States and is sentenced to the maximum penalty and to die in prison, we must start a campaign to tear down the Statue of Liberty."

Lopez Obrador, who met with Biden the following week, said afterwards that he reiterated to the US president that "Mexico is offering protection and asylum to Julian Assange" but that he had [not yet heard back](#) from Biden.

"I left a letter to the president about Assange, explaining that he did not commit any serious crime, did not cause anyone's death, did not violate any human rights, and that he exercised his freedom, and that arresting him would mean a permanent affront to freedom of expression," Lopez Obrador said.

Although Biden promised to 're-engage' with Latin America upon taking office, ties between the US and other nations in the region have remained strained. In fact, tensions hit a new level of uneasiness during Biden's much-vaunted 'Summit of the Americas' in June, which saw the

American president snubbed by a number of leaders following the US' refusal to invite Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua over accusations of human rights violations.

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Ukrainian Security Forces Storm Historic Orthodox Church in 'Counterintelligence' Raid
By - Wyatt Reed

The notorious Ukrainian security forces responsible for rounding up supposed 'Russian collaborators' appear to have been given a new target: Orthodox priests and parishioners. Ukraine's SBU security forces raided a 1,000-year-old Orthodox Christian monastery in Kiev on Tuesday in what they described as efforts to neutralize supposed "subversive activities by Russian special services."

The main target of the raids, the Kiev Monastery of the Caves, was built in 1051 and is classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. But it wasn't the only church affected – Kiev regime forces also hit the monastery in Korets on Tuesday, alongside several other Ukrainian Orthodox Churches in the region.

Vladimir Legoida, a spokesman for the Russian Orthodox Church, denounced the raid by Kiev regime forces as an "act of intimidation."

"Like many other cases of persecution of believers in Ukraine since 2014, this act of intimidation of believers is almost certain to go unnoticed by those who call themselves the international human rights community," Legoida noted.

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) insisted in a [post on Telegram](#) that "these measures are being taken... to counter the destructive activities of Russian special services in Ukraine."

The statement declined to mention what – if any – contraband was recovered, but cited suspicions "about the use of the premises ... for sheltering sabotage and reconnaissance groups, foreign citizens, weapons storage."

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church attempted to cut ties with the Russian Orthodox Church in May following a split over ongoing hostilities between Russia and Ukraine. However, that seems to have done little to alleviate suspicions among the Zelensky regime that churchgoers secretly sympathize with the Russian perspective, because it's far from the first time Orthodox priests or parishioners have felt their wrath.

In October, one pro-Kiev militant told Al Jazeera that a similar raid on an Orthodox Church in the city of Sviatohirsk was necessary because "[we see all these monks as Russian agents](#) — so there's a very high chance they've been hiding collaborators."

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'Every Right to Defend Themselves': US Appears to Greenlight Turkish Offensive
By - Wyatt Reed

After a Pentagon spokesman warned Turkey its strikes on Kurdish militias “threaten our shared goals,” Biden’s National Security Council coordinator conceded Ankara continues to “suffer a legitimate terrorist threat.”

A high-level Biden official appeared to contradict the Defense Department and signal some level of US support for ongoing anti-Kurdish military operations by Turkey during a press briefing on Tuesday.

John Kirby, coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council, told reporters that “Turkey does continue to suffer a legitimate terrorist threat, particularly to their south,” and he seemed to validate the Turkish rationale for their ongoing offensive when he declared that “they certainly have every right to defend themselves and their citizens.”

But Kirby implied the US still has some reservations about the potential consequences of escalating hostilities, too.

“What concerns us about cross-border operations remains the same... that it might force a reaction by some of our SDF [Syrian Democratic Forces] partners that would limit and constrain their ability to continue to fight against [Daesh* militants].”

SDF militias tended to be organized by largely-Kurdish “People’s Protection Units” (YPG), which the Turkish government considers to be an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) that Ankara classifies as a terrorist group.

Turkey has reportedly struck dozens of targets in numerous air raids targeting military bases of Kurdish separatists in Syria and Iraq since launching “Operation Claw-Sword” on Sunday. The operation came in response to a terrorist bombing in downtown Istanbul last week which killed six people and wounded at least 80.

Ankara accused the PKK of carrying out the devastating attack, and Interior Minister Süleyman Soyulu went as far as accusing the US of [complicity in the bombing](#), likening a rapid American statement of condolences to “a killer being first to show up at a crime scene.”

Since then, US officials had largely kept quiet about Turkey’s retaliation. But on Tuesday, a Pentagon spokesman reportedly warned Ankara against taking actions that might “destabilize Syria or violate Iraq’s sovereignty,” telling Al Monitor that Turkey’s “actions [threaten our shared goals](#)” in the region, including the fight against ISIS.

The latest comments by a high-ranking member of the National Security Council seem to contradict such a view, however. But with less than 1,000 publicly-acknowledged troops on the ground currently, there’s likely not much the US could do to change the situation on the ground even if it wanted to.

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Erdogan Warns Turkish Airstrikes on Kurdish Militias Are ‘Just the Beginning’

By - Wyatt Reed

Kurdish US proxy forces are begging the US to intervene as Washington and Moscow mull over their responses to Turkey’s military plans for contested regions of Iraq and Syria.

Recent airstrikes on Kurdish targets are “just the beginning,” Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan promised in a fiery address in which he warned of an imminent invasion in areas of Syria and Iraq where Ankara has a “right to take care of” its security concerns.

Turkey’s “determination to secure all [its] southern border” with a “safe zone” is “stronger today than ever before,” Erdogan insisted before lawmakers in parliament on Wednesday. “While we press ahead with air raids uninterrupted, we will crack down on terrorists also by land at the most convenient time for us.”

Ankara has been pounding regions of Syria and Iraq for four days with strikes they claim have resulted in 254 “terrorists” being “neutralized.”

Erdogan’s comments serve as the latest signal that tensions in northern Syria are likely to ratchet up in the near term – a prospect which has been greeted with alarm among many factions, especially Kurdish.

On Wednesday, Pentagon Press Secretary Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder expressed “deep concern” over the recent Turkish strikes, claiming that in at least one instance they “directly threatened the safety of US personnel.” However, he reiterated that the US recognizes what he described as Turkey’s “legitimate security concerns.”

Gen. Mazloum Abdi, commander of the so-called “Syrian Democratic Forces,” called on Biden the same day to intervene to prevent Turkish forces from intervening, telling Politico “the president himself” has a “political and humanitarian responsibility” in terms of “protecting the cities [and] protecting the Kurds.”

“So far, statements that have been put out are not enough to stop the Turkish plans to launch new operations against us,” Abdi claimed.

Senior Russian negotiator Alexander Lavrentyev has described the Kurdish population as “hostages of the United States,” and said blame for their current predicament ultimately lies with Washington.

“Without the US presence, the Kurdish issue could have been resolved very quickly,” Lavrentyev said.

The diplomat indicated the Russian Federation has directly requested that Turkey refrain from launching a ground offensive, telling reporters Wednesday that “we hope our arguments will be heard in Ankara and other ways of resolving the problem will be found.”

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Venezuelan Government, Opposition to Meet in Mexico City This Weekend After Fruitless 2021 Talks

By - Wyatt Reed

If successful, the talks could lead to a big boost in the amount of petroleum products the US allows the government of Venezuela to export on the world market.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro’s government and representatives of the Caribbean nation’s opposition parties will meet in Mexico City for political negotiations this weekend, it’s being reported.

Neither the Venezuelan presidency nor the opposition parties in question have publicly mentioned the talks, which would be the first of their kind in over a year. But Colombian President Gustavo Petro confirmed on Twitter Wednesday that “the dialogue between the Maduro government and the Venezuelan opposition will resume” on “November 25 and 26.” The discussions could lead to the US ending its devastating sanctions against the former major oil exporter, and will also reportedly pertain to upcoming presidential elections and the status of pro-opposition prisoners. According to Reuters, should the talks [pan out](#), “Chevron could win US approval to vastly expand operations in Venezuela as soon as Saturday.”

After years of imposing so-called “maximum pressure” sanctions on Venezuela, the US suddenly shifted gears after Russia’s special military operation kicked off on February 24. Biden sent a high-level delegation to Caracas just nine days later, in what was widely derided as a US effort to secure access to Venezuela’s vast petroleum supplies and compensate for Russian oil that US sanctions would make unavailable.

But Biden regime insiders have brushed off criticism that their 180-degree shift on Venezuela was a transparent political ploy, with one reportedly [insisting recently](#) that any expansion of Caracas’ oil allowance terms would not reflect US desperation on the energy front, but rather a desire “to support the restoration of democracy in Venezuela.”

This weekend’s talks are set to be hosted by Norway, which facilitated the last attempt at intra-Venezuelan dialogue in October 2021. That effort crumbled abruptly after the Venezuelan government withdrew from discussions in response to the US extradition of Alex Saab, the Venezuelan diplomat who helped the Maduro administration secure trade deals and provide suppliers for their food distribution programs.

A spokesperson for the US State Department – which has long been accused of effectively overseeing key Venezuelan opposition parties – reportedly responded to the news that talks are set to resume by stating “we support the Unitary Platform’s efforts around negotiations” but claimed “the United States is not a party to negotiations between the Unitary Platform and the Maduro regime, so we defer to the UP on anything further.”

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Millions in Golden Coins Missing After Audacious Museum Heist in Germany
By - Wyatt Reed

A brazen late-night robbery of a German museum has local officials reeling as regional authorities suspect “organized crime” is behind the million-dollar caper.

A trove of ancient Celtic gold coins worth millions was stolen from a German museum, police revealed Tuesday.

State police in Bavaria said thieves made off with 483 coins and a lump of gold from the Celtic and Roman Museum in Manching, Germany, after making it in and out of the building in [less than ten minutes](#) – and all without alerting authorities to their presence.

Per a preliminary investigation, the thieves pulled off the expert caper by disabling the power – and not just to the alarms connecting the museum to police, but to “the whole of Manching,” Mayor Herbert Nerb reportedly [told](#) a local media outlet.

Police say at just past 1 a.m. on Tuesday, the bandits snipped a cable at a telecoms hub and severed over 1,000 local connections, then broke into the museum and made off with the stash of gold, before finally vanishing into the night – all within under 20 minutes from start to finish. Police quickly determined the telecoms attack was likely linked to an attempted robbery, but they misjudged the target. Instead of sending patrol cars to the museums, officers ended up at local banks instead.

The Bavarian minister of science and arts, Markus Blume, described “the loss of the Celtic treasure” as a “[disaster](#),” noting that “as a testament to our history, the gold coins are irreplaceable.”

Highlighting the “incredible criminal energy” of the perpetrators, Blume claimed the heist was likely to be the work of trained professionals.

“It’s clear that you don’t simply march into a museum and take this treasure with you,” he reportedly told a German public broadcaster. “It’s highly secured and as such there’s a suspicion that we’re rather dealing with a case of organized crime.”

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Over 40 Foreign Nationals Detained Amid Ongoing Anti-Government Protests in Iran
By - Wyatt Reed

Detentions of various foreigners indicate Iranian claims of foreign involvement in ongoing deadly anti-government protests are more fact than fiction, at least one international expert says.

At least 40 foreign nationals have been detained by Iranian police amid ongoing anti-government demonstrations, Iran’s judicial spokesman said.

According to at least one Western expert, the detentions demonstrate that Iranian accusations of Western involvement are more fact than fiction.

“The arrests show that support of foreign governments [for] Iranian protesters is not merely verbal, a fact that will have consequential effect on the protests’ trajectory,” Middle East Institute’s senior research fellow Asif Shuja told a US media outlet.

The perpetrators detained by Iranian security forces [include nationals](#) from France, Sweden, Italy, Poland, the Netherlands, Germany, and Australia.

Iran has been plagued by protests and riots for months, and senior government officials laid the blame for the unrest at the feet of external forces from the beginning.

But it now appears increasingly clear that Iran’s accusations of foreign meddling contain far more fact than fiction.

The specter of foreign involvement has lingered over the apparent ongoing attempted color revolution in Iran since its very inception, but accusations of external involvement have grown in recent days.

The most recent demonstration of foreign involvement took place this week when various high-level western politicians falsely insisted Iran intended to execute tens of thousands of political dissidents.

Among the highest-level political figures to fall victim to the anti-iranian fake news was Canadian President Justin Trudeau, who has yet to explain who he deleted without comment his entirely [nonsensical claim](#) that Iran is on the verge of executing thousands of dissidents.

Dozens of protesters and police have been killed amid violent protests which have rocked the Islamic Republic since a 22-year-old woman died under police custody on September 14th. Demonstrators blame Iranian police for the death of Mahsa Amini who is assumed by protestors to have been beaten to death by police after she failed to cover her hair, though an [autopsy](#) by the state subsequently concluded she died of a heart attack and not "by blows to the head or any vital organs and parts of the body", which contradicts the Iranian authorities' earlier statement that she had [fallen](#).

Amini's family have denied that she suffered any heart condition.

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Germans Are Growing Weary of Propping Up Ukrainian Regime, Survey Finds

By - Wyatt Reed

A new survey has found that the German public's appetite for continuing to prop up the Ukrainian regime is beginning to dwindle, and may be the latest indication that Germans' interest in supporting the Zelensky regime is continuing to wane.

In an [analysis](#) of the data published in an American news outlet, the authors of the study note that even decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany retains a stark political divide on geographic lines: "while only 27 percent of West German respondents are opposed to increasing military assistance to Ukraine, 52 percent of East Germans express this view." The opinion poll of 1,000 Germans found "a majority (54 percent) think that their country is doing enough (37 percent) or too much (17 percent) to help Ukraine's military efforts and its refugees."

The [poll](#) comes just days after German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock acknowledged that the "vast majority" of Germans "pose critical questions of their government" over rising food and energy prices, but insisted "this winter we will continue to stand by Ukraine's side."

But the statisticians' findings paint a somewhat different picture. When asked if they'd support increasing sanctions on Russia, sending more military equipment to Ukraine, admitting more refugees, or admitting Ukraine into NATO, nearly a third of respondents declined. And for those willing to consider more handouts for Ukraine, it's more complicated. Only 31% strongly support "either delivering more weapons to Ukraine or admitting more refugees," and "strong support for admitting Ukraine to NATO is lower still" at 26%, researchers write.

"In other words, German support for increasing either military assistance or humanitarian aid is lukewarm," they found. Comparing the public's desire for greater German participation in the conflict in Ukraine to the country's role in the US invasion of Afghanistan, they determined that

since February, “Germans have become more hesitant about being involved militarily.” And the fact that “Germans are losing enthusiasm for admitting more Ukrainians” compounds the situation further, they say.

Conversations about how to handle huge shocking price increases have dominated Germany’s domestic political sphere recently, as average households are far from the only ones affected by the gas crunch. With production in energy-intensive sectors having fallen by more than 2% since July, the chief economist for ING Germany warned last month that a recession is “inevitable,” noting “we don’t need a crystal ball to see a further weakening of German industry in the coming months.”

In an apparent effort to buy off voters and stave off further discontent, the government recently [announced plans](#) to reimburse all German households the cost of their December gas bill. But with gas prices having “soared to ten times their previous levels,” the study’s researchers conclude that “even that might not be enough to boost German public support for delivering weapons and admitting more Ukrainian refugees.”

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Black Friday A Bust as Record Inflation Leaves Americans Buying Less
By - Wyatt Reed

A much anticipated return to in-person Black Friday shopping in the US drew significantly fewer customers than expected, it’s being reported. Crowded stores “appeared to be an exception” in the US, an American news outlet wrote on Friday, as deeply diminished purchasing power left shoppers’ hopes for loading up on discounted presents dashed.

Mainstream media outlets reported a glum mood among those who did turn out. “I am shopping less,” one woman told an American news outlet. “The money is not going as far as last year,” another reportedly said.

Consumers are responding to the bleak economic outlook by cutting back this year, with preliminary data showing E-commerce spending on Thanksgiving Day rose just 2.9% – nowhere near matching the eye-watering 8% inflation rate the US hit in October.

The dismal Black Friday showing signals that record inflation, which Biden administration officials [acknowledged](#) in June was at least partly caused by their sanctions against Russia, is hitting average Americans hard. At 60%, the number of shoppers who say the dire economic outlook is affecting their holiday plans hit its highest level since 2008’s Great Recession, per the National Retail Federation.

[Other data](#) shows a clear class divide among those pinching pennies and those splurging this year – according to an American news source, while 56% of households bringing in over \$100,000 said they’re worried about inflation’s impact on their spending power, a full 78% percent of households earning less than \$50,000 report being concerned.

All this comes as a [report](#) from the Federal Reserve of New York found that credit card balances jumped 15% in the third quarter of 2022 – the biggest increase year-over-year in over two decades.

The situation for retailers was further complicated as Amazon workers in at least 40 countries decided to strike or engage in other labor actions on Black Friday in an effort to secure better pay and improve conditions on the job.

Whether or not they succeed, at the end of the day, there's little retail outlets can do to remedy the broader macroeconomic situation. As Salesforce VP Rob Garf reportedly told an American news source, "people are just plainly buying less products because their dollar isn't going as far as it used to."

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Plane Gets Trapped in Power Lines, 90,000 Without Power in Maryland
By - Ian DeMartino

The plane reportedly took off from Westchester County Airport in White Plains, New York and was headed toward Montgomery County Airpark in Gaithersburg, Maryland before crashing. A small plane crashed into power lines and a transmission tower in Maryland on Sunday night, trapping the pilot and a passenger on board while thousands in the area remain without power. Authorities in Gaithersburg, Maryland, say that crews are working into the night to save the two individuals trapped inside the plane. Once the individuals are safe, they will begin to restore power to the nearly 90,000 residential and business buildings that are currently without power. Photographs posted on social media show the plane entangled in the power lines and a steel transmission tower typically used for high-voltage lines. It is unknown what led to the accident, though the area was experiencing mild inclement weather at the time of the crash.

Steel transmission towers are taller than residential power line poles, the plane appears to be at least several stories high.

Utility provider Pepco said it is assessing the damage caused by the crash and is working with emergency responders to resolve the situation as quickly as possible. The company tweeted Sunday night that it is waiting to be cleared by authorities before it could begin work on restoring power.

The plane – believed to be a Mooney M20J – crashed into the cables around 5:40 p.m. on Sunday, a few miles from the Montgomery County Airpark in Montgomery Village.

At a 9 p.m. briefing, Fire Chief Scott Goldstein said that emergency crews have been in contact with the two occupants of the plane, who have not suffered major injuries. Emergency responders need to make sure the power is completely off and the wires are grounded before securing the plane. They will then attempt to rescue the occupants and then power services can be restored.

Gaithersburg is about 25 miles Northwest of Washington D.C. The power outage is also affecting the D.C. Metro; trains are bypassing the Wheaton Station due to a power outage. The Metro's official Twitter page confirmed that the outage was due to the plane crash.

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US Special Envoy in Oman, Saudi Arabia for Yemen Peace Talks – State Department

WASHINGTON, November 28 (Sputnik) – US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking has commenced a trip to Oman and Saudi Arabia for peace talks, according to a press release. "U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking started travel on November 27 to Oman and Saudi Arabia to support ongoing peace efforts. The environment created by the UN-mediated truce presents the best opportunity Yemen has had for peace in several years," a State Department spokesperson said in the release.

The United States urges the Houthis to seize the opportunity for peace, cooperate with the United Nations, and "accept that the only path forward to ending eight years of destructive war is through a negotiated, inclusive Yemeni-led political settlement," the release added.

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Oil Prices Fall for 3rd Week in Row as Plan to Cap Russian Selling Price Stays in Limbo

NEW YORK, November 25 (Sputnik) - Crude prices fell for a third straight week after European officials failed to agree on a price cap for Russian oil despite debating a level thought to be more generous than one that could risk retaliation from the Kremlin in the form of production or export cuts.

A record number of new coronavirus cases in No. 1 oil importing nation China, which made local authorities more determined to hold on to the country's tough Zero-COVID policy, also weighed on crude prices.

Thinner-than-usual trading volumes after Thursday's Thanksgiving holiday, an event that typically prompts traders to take longer breaks until the weekend, added to the market's somber mood.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, settled down \$1.66, 2.1%, at \$76.28 per barrel. The US crude benchmark, which hit a 10-month low beneath \$76 on Monday, was down 4.5% for the week, after back-to-back losses of 10% and 4% in weeks prior.

London-traded Brent settled down \$1.71, or 2%, at \$83.63. The global crude benchmark, which plunged to a nine-month low of under \$83 on Monday, was down 4.5% for the week, after back-to-back losses of 9% and 3% in weeks prior.

"So long as the suggested cap on Russian oil remains higher than what the market initially thought, the general impression is the Kremlin will react less adversely in terms of limiting its exports and production," said John Kilduff, founding partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital. "That would be a negative for oil."

Officials from the Group of Seven nations, or G7, have been discussing a Russian oil price cap between \$65 and \$70 a barrel with their European Union diplomatic counterparts over the past few days, but have been unable to reach an agreement, reports said.

The G7 and EU are aiming to limit the revenue from oil that could fund Moscow's military offensive in the Ukraine without disrupting global oil markets. But the proposed level is broadly in line with what Asian buyers are already paying. Several market experts have also said the oil price cap was basically a political gimmick that would do little to impact Russia's ongoing oil trades. Moscow, for its part, has steadfastly refused to sell oil to any buyer that participates in the G7-EU plan, making the cap even less workable.

Despite the double whammy of the deadlock on the Russian oil price cap and tumbling Chinese demand for oil amid a coronavirus outbreak, some traders said they expected crude prices to climb next week in anticipation of remedial action by the OPEC+ oil producing alliance when it meets Dec. 4.

OPEC+ — which groups OPEC, or the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, with 10 other oil producers steered by Russia — already has an agreement to cut production by 2 million barrels per day till end of next year to boost Brent and US crude prices, which have fallen some 40% from their March highs.

Earlier this week, Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman indicated that OPEC+ will likely add to those cuts when it meets Dec. 4.

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Average US Family Spending Increases by \$433 a Month For Same Goods This Year - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - The average US household spending is up \$433 a month for the same products and services as compared to last year, CNBC reported on Friday, citing an analysis by Moody's Analytics of October inflation data.

"Despite weaker-than-expected inflation in October, households are still feeling the squeeze from rising consumer prices," Bernard Yaros, an economist at Moody's, was quoted by CNBC as saying.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, expanded by 7.7% during the year to October, growing at its slowest pace of in nine months after peaking with a 9.1% growth during the 12 months to June.

The drop came after relentless interest rate hikes by the Fed, which has added 375 basis points to rates since March, from a starting point of just 25.

Despite such an aggressive campaign, inflation remains more than three times higher than levels preferred by the central bank, which has vowed to get to its 2% target.

After four straight jumbo-sized hikes of 75 basis points between June and November, markets expect the Fed to impose a smaller increase of 50 basis points at its upcoming rate decision on December 14.

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US FCC Prohibits Sale of Telecoms, Surveillance Equipment Made by Huawei, ZTE - Order

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) prohibited the sale of telecoms and video surveillance equipment manufactured by Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE, according to an order released Friday.

"In adopting the Commission's proposal to prohibit authorization of any communications equipment that has been placed on the Covered List, this Report and Order... Prohibits authorization of all telecommunications and video surveillance equipment produced by Huawei and ZTE," the FCC said in a rulemaking report and order.

The prohibition builds on efforts by the Commission, Congress and Biden administration to take further action to protect the security of critical US communications networks and equipment supply chains, the order said.

The prohibition also covers all subsidiaries and affiliates of Huawei and ZTE, the order said.

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Austin, German Counterpart Discuss Joint Effort to Support Ukraine - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III and German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht spoke by phone to discuss coordinated support for Ukraine and the security of NATO's Eastern Flank, the Pentagon said in a readout on Friday.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke with German Federal Minister of Defence Christine Lambrecht to discuss joint efforts to support Ukraine and to enhance security along NATO's Eastern Flank," the readout said. "Secretary Austin praised Germany's leadership in providing security assistance to Ukraine, which is having a major positive impact on Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russian aggression. The two leaders agreed to continue to closely coordinate their efforts in assisting Ukraine and strengthening NATO deterrence."

Since Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine on February 24, Western countries have been providing Kiev with humanitarian, military and financial aid. Moscow has denounced the flow of weapons to Ukraine from its Western allies, saying it adds fuel to the fire.

Moscow has repeatedly warned the West against further involvement in the conflict, while the European Union, the United States, and NATO have maintained that they are not a party to the hostilities despite training Ukrainian soldiers, sending weapons to Ukraine, and providing intelligence for military operations.

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Blinken to Attend NATO Ministerial in Romania Next Week, Meet Kuleba - State Dept

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to Romania next week to take part in the NATO Ministerial and hold separate meetings with the Alliance's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, State Department spokesman Ned Price announced in a statement on Friday.

"Blinken will travel to Bucharest, Romania November 28-30, where he will attend the NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting," Price said. "The NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting will focus on Russia's war against Ukraine, implementation of NATO's new Strategic Concept, including challenges from the People's Republic of China, energy security, protection of critical infrastructure, and NATO's efforts to build capacity and strengthen resilience in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Moldova."

During the visit, Blinken will hold separate meetings with Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu, as well as Stoltenberg, Price noted.

Blinken will also attend a working dinner with his Ukrainian counterpart Kuleba, Price said.

While in Bucharest, Blinken and Romanian Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucu will tour the exhibit, "We the People – 25 Years of Strategic Partnership," Price said.

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US Senate to Hold Hearing for Biden's Nominee for Ambassador to Russia Next Week - Notice

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold a hearing next week with President Joe Biden's nominee for ambassador to Russia, Lynne Tracy, the committee said in a scheduling notice on Friday.

Tracy's nomination hearing is scheduled to be held on Wednesday at 2:30PM EST (19:30 GMT).

Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov said earlier in November that Moscow hopes that a new US ambassador to Russia will be appointed soon and the embassy in Moscow will become fully operational.

On September 20, Biden nominated Tracy to replace John Sullivan, who was appointed by former President Donald Trump in 2019. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said in September that Moscow had signaled its agreement on Tracy's appointment as US ambassador.

Tracy's nomination must first advance through the Foreign Relations Committee before the full Senate can vote to confirm her to the post.

A career member of the Senior Foreign Service, Tracy currently serves as US ambassador to Armenia. Prior to her current position, she worked as a Senior Adviser for Russia at the State Department Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs.

Tracy has also previously worked as a Desk Officer for Kazakhstan and Georgia, as well as Deputy Chief of Mission in Turkmenistan.

Tracy earned a bachelor's degree in Soviet Studies from the University of Georgia and a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Akron in Ohio.

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Trump Says Met With Ye, 'Guest' Following Reports of Talks With Controversial Commentator

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Friday that he met with artist Ye, formerly known as Kanye West, and an unknown guest of his at Mar-a-Lago, following reports that the guest was controversial political commentator Nicholas Fuentes.

"Kanye West very much wanted to visit Mar-a-Lago. Our dinner meeting was intended to be Kanye and me only, but he arrived with a guest whom I had never met and knew nothing about," Trump said in a statement, as quoted by Axios.

Earlier in the day, the media outlet, citing two sources familiar with the matter, reported that Fuentes – whose views have been characterized by some as racist and anti-Semitic – met with Trump alongside Ye on Tuesday night.

On Wednesday, US media reported that Fuentes was not present at the Mar-a-Lago dinner with Ye.

Last month, Ye spoke with Trump to plan a dinner between the two amid accusations of anti-Semitism against both men. Ye was criticized for claims that Jewish people hold disproportionate power in certain industries, leading to the cancellation of several major business deals. Trump was criticized for claiming the US Jewish community was not grateful enough for his support of Israel as president.

Earlier this week, Ye announced that he intends to join the 2024 US presidential race. Another controversial political commentator, Milo Yiannopoulos, who is part Jewish, is leading the campaign, Ye said.

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Trudeau Tells Inquiry Canadian Police Did Not Keep 'Freedom Convoy' Protests in Check

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Friday defended his decision to invoke emergency powers in February in response to the so-called "Freedom Convoy" protests, telling a public inquiry that Canadian police had failed to keep the demonstrators "under control."

Trudeau made the remarks while appearing before the Public Order Emergency Commission, which is investigating the government's first-ever use of the Emergencies Act to disburse protesters.

"The ability to keep it under control [from the side of police] was not exactly there," Trudeau told the commission.

In early 2022, Canada was shaken by weeks of protests led by truck drivers who blocked border crossings, highways and streets in major cities to demand the lifting of vaccine mandates and other COVID-19-related safety measures.

Trudeau in response invoked the Emergencies Act on February 14 for the first time in Canada's history, an action currently being questioned by parliamentary opposition parties, civil society and other public actors who consider his use of the legislation unlawful.

Trudeau then revoked the act on February 23, after police had cleared the protests in Ottawa and arrested nearly 200 people.

Critics have accused the Trudeau government of abusing the emergency powers, especially with measures such as freezing the bank accounts of those suspected of supporting the blockades.

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Texas Sends More Immigrants From US Southern Border to Philadelphia - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - The state of Texas continues to send buses with immigrants from the US-Mexico border to the city of Philadelphia on the nation's northeastern coast as part of a battle over the Biden administration's border policy, the Philadelphia Inquirer reported on Friday.

Two buses loaded with immigrants arrived in Philadelphia from Texas on Friday morning, the report said. Four buses carrying around 150 people have arrived in the city in the last 10 days, sent by Texas Governor Greg Abbott, the report said, citing local officials.

"President [Joe] Biden's continued dereliction of duty has forced Texas to ramp up border security efforts. We will continue to protect our country from Biden's dangerous open border policies," Abbott said on Wednesday via Twitter, in response to earlier reports of immigrants arriving in Philadelphia.

However, Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney considers the move a political stunt against the migrant families, the report said.

Earlier this month, Abbott invoked invasion clauses of the US and Texas constitutions to address the influx of illegal immigration on the US-Mexico border under the Biden administration following two consecutive record-breaking years of illegal crossing into the US.

Well over 2 million illegal crossings into the US were recorded in fiscal year 2022, according to Customs and Border Protection. Texas is deploying armored personnel carriers and enhancing security along the state's border with Mexico, a Texas National Guard spokesperson told Sputnik earlier this week.

All immigrants sent to Philadelphia have permission to be in the US as they pursue claims in federal immigration court, with almost all of them seeking asylum, the report said. Most of the immigrants who have arrived in Philadelphia since November 16 have left the city to connect with family in other states, the report also said.

The immigrants originally came from countries including Colombia, Cuba, Panama and the Dominican Republic, the report added.

The immigrants said their trip started after officials announced free trips to Chicago, New York or Philadelphia over a loudspeaker at a border facility in Del Rio, Texas, the report said.

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Jenkins to Attend Chemical, Bio-Weapons Conventions in Geneva, Hague - State Dept

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - US Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins will travel to the Netherlands and Switzerland on November 28-31 to participate in the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Ninth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the State Department said in a release on Friday.

"In The Hague, the Under Secretary will lead the US Delegation to the Twenty-Seventh Session of the Conference of the States Parties (CSP) to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)," the release said. "As Head of Delegation and with the support of US Permanent Representative to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Ambassador Joseph Manso, Under Secretary Jenkins will deliver the US National Statement, participate in a Women, Peace, and Security side event, hold bilateral meetings, and engage with counterparts to demonstrate the United States' continued support of the OPCW."

While in Geneva, Jenkins will head the US Delegation to the Ninth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), the State Department said.

"As Head of Delegation and with US Special Representative to the BWC Mr. Ken Ward, Under Secretary Jenkins will deliver the US National Statement and hold bilateral meetings to strengthen the BWC," the release said.

Jenkins will also co-host a side event on the impact of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in the BWC with UN Under Secretary-General Izumi Nakamitsu, the release added.

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At Least 100 Children Under 15 Years Old Among Dead in Indonesia Earthquake - UNICEF

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - At least 100 children under the age of 15 were among those killed in the recent earthquake in the Indonesian province of West Java, UNICEF Indonesia said in a statement on Friday.

"According to the latest official estimate as of November 24, 100 children under 15 years have lost their lives, making up 37 percent of the 272 total number of persons killed," the statement said. "Reports indicate that 2,046 persons have been injured, 39 persons are missing and 62,882 persons have been displaced."

The massive 5.6 magnitude earthquake struck the Cianjur Regency of West Java on Monday. Head of the National Disaster Management Agency Suharyanto said earlier on Friday that the total number of people killed by the earthquake had grown to 310.

At least 45 schools were damaged by the earthquake, while some 18 students and 5 teachers were killed, and another 267 students and 10 teachers injured, UNICEF said.

"Humanitarian needs in affected areas are expected to mount, as ongoing search and rescue operations reveal the true toll and scale of need. In an emergency, children and families that have lost loved ones, been displaced, or injured, urgently need shelter, clean water, medical care and protection," UNICEF said. "The Government of Indonesia is leading the emergency response to address these and other challenges facing children and communities. UNICEF and partners are supporting these efforts to help determine the most pressing needs of children and their families."

Indonesia is located in a seismically active zone and regularly suffers from powerful earthquakes. Every year, seismologists register up to 7,000 earthquakes with a magnitude above 4.0.

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Virginia Walmart Gunman Bought 9mm Handgun on Morning of Mass Shooting – City

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) – The gunman behind Tuesday's mass shooting at a Walmart in Chesapeake, Virginia used a 9mm handgun purchased on the morning of the attack, the municipal government said on Friday.

"Police can also confirm that the suspect used a 9mm handgun," the City of Chesapeake stated on its Twitter account. "The gun was legally purchased from a local store on the morning of Tuesday, November 22, 2022."

The city also shared that a box of ammunition and other items related to the gun – a box, receipt, and other paperwork – were found at the suspect's house.

Police also found a rambling note typed on the suspect's phone from the crime scene that referred to grievances and betrayals with "associates," and concluded with "My God forgive me for what I am going to do."

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RPT - Syrian Kurds Hear Only 'Silence' From US, UN on Turkish Attacks - SDC

WASHINGTON, November 24 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Kurds are only hearing silence from Washington and the UN after Turkey's airstrikes in Syria, Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) Representative in the United States, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.

On Sunday, Turkey conducted airstrikes targeting Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its military wing, People's Defense Units (YPG), in Syria. According to the Turkish Defense Ministry, a total of 89 targets were destroyed during the operation.

"Where is the condemnation of the United Nations and the international community [and] even Washington? Right now, we hear only silence. This can only be interpreted as a tacit support for this Turkish aggression," Saker said.

Saker said the strikes targeted Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Syrian army.

"They are targeting the Syrian infrastructure in the area. The world is seeking to have stability in the area but these attacks are breaking the stability and worsen humanitarian issues," he added.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday that the army intends to clear the northern Syrian regions of Tall Rifat, Manbij and Ayn al Arab, also known as Kobani, of Kurdish militants.

A US Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson told Sputnik on Wednesday that Turkish airstrikes in Syria earlier this week posed a risk to US forces in the region.

The United States previously said the Turkish strikes did not pose a risk to US forces, according to media reports.

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Texas Military Says Sending Armored Troop Carriers, Boosting Security at Southern Border

AUSTIN, Texas, November 24 (Sputnik) - Texas is deploying armored personnel carriers and enhancing security along the state's southern border with Mexico amid record-breaking levels of illegal immigration, a Texas National Guard spokesperson told Sputnik.

"The Texas National Guard, under direction of the Adjutant General, is deploying [ten] M113 Armored Personnel Carriers to the southern Texas-Mexico border, as well as increasing aircraft flights and security efforts," the spokesperson said.

These actions are part of a larger strategy to fight back against the influx of illegal immigration on the southern border and the state is taking unprecedented measures to repel migrants trying to cross the border illegally, the spokesperson said.

Earlier this month, Texas Governor Greg Abbott invoked invasion clauses of the US and Texas constitutions to address the influx of illegal immigration on the US-Mexico border under the Biden administration.

Abbott said his order deploys National Guardsmen and state police officers to the Texas-Mexico border with the authority to arrest illegal migrants.

Moreover, Abbott said, through the order, he can build additional border wall, deploy gun boats on the Rio Grande river, designate Mexican drug cartels as terrorist organizations, boost cooperation with other US states to address illegal migration, and enter into agreement with foreign countries such as Mexico to enhance border security.

The United States has seen two consecutive record breaking years of illegal crossings into the United States since Biden assumed office in January 2021. Well over two million illegal

crossings into the United States were recorded in fiscal year 2022, according to Customs and Border Protection.

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Western Countries Encourage Ukraine to Make Threats, Take Reckless Approach - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, November 24 (Sputnik) - Western countries are encouraging Ukrainian reckless behavior and threatening approach, the Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said at a Security Council meeting.

"In the meantime, what we are hearing from Mr. [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelenskyy and his supporters is not at all readiness to achieve peace but rather the language of reckless threats and ultimatums and Western sponsors are only encouraging such reckless approach," Nebenzia said on Wednesday.

Ukraine is not in their interest but making huge profits on military issues and to test NATO armaments, he added.

Wednesday's meeting was called for at the last moment. Zelenskyy was also participating in the briefing with his video recorded statement. Zelenskyy told the UN Security Council that he is extending an invitation to the United Nations expert mission to visit Ukraine and examine the country's critical infrastructure.

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo, who was briefing on behalf of the UN, expressed her deep concerns.

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Chevron Says Complies With Sanctions in Venezuela, Gives No Confirmation of Policy Changes

WASHINGTON, November 24 (Sputnik) - Chevron continues to comply with US sanctions that limit its operations in Venezuela to solely essential maintenance activity, a company spokesperson told Sputnik in light of reports that the United States May permit the company to expand its operations.

The Biden administration could grant Chevron authority to expand operations in Venezuela as soon as Saturday after the Venezuelan government led by President Nicolas Maduro and its opposition resume political talks in Mexico City, media reported.

"We continue to conduct our businesses in compliance with the current sanctions framework provided by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) under General License 8," the spokesperson said on Wednesday when asked about reports claiming the United States May allow Chevron to expand operations in Venezuela.

Chevron has a constructive presence in Venezuela with dedicated investments and a large workforce dependent on its presence, the spokesperson said, adding that the company also remains committed to the integrity of its joint venture assets.

However, the potential change would return US policy on Venezuela to the license framework that existed prior to 2020, which would basically allow US oil companies to operate in Venezuela's oil fields and to commercialize Venezuelan crude, but not expand activity in any way.

A source familiar with the matter said that for oil production in Venezuela to really move up, Western partners would need to be allowed to invest, which will take time.

The Biden administration has until December 1 to decide whether it will renew the license that allows Chevron and four other US oil companies, including Halliburton, to continue essential maintenance activity on their assets in Venezuela, but it does not permit oil production. The US Treasury has renewed this license 10 times before.

The Biden administration is looking at Venezuela as an additional source for crude oil, but but has no intention of a blanket lifting of sanctions, sources told Sputnik earlier this month.

The Biden administration is looking for options to help lower gasoline prices for US consumers after OPEC decided to slash production due to a slowing economy and the Strategic Petroleum Reserve supply drops to record lows after President Biden released some 180 million barrels since March.

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RPT - Zelenskyy Invites UN Expert Mission to Examine Ukraine's Critical Infrastructure
(Repeats to fix typo in dateline)

UNITED NATIONS, November 24 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told the UN Security Council that he is extending an invitation to the United Nations expert mission to visit Ukraine and examine the country's critical infrastructure.

"I confirm my invitation on behalf of Ukraine for the expert mission from UN to examine the critical infrastructure of Ukraine and the facilities should be examined and evaluated to document what was done against the infrastructure that provides for lives of tens of millions of people," Zelenskyy said via video on Wednesday.

The UN Security Council is holding at present an emergency session at the request of Ukraine. Earlier on Wednesday, the Ukrainian authorities issued a nationwide air raid alert. Deputy chief of the Office of the President Kyrylo Tymoshenko said that several energy facilities were damaged by Russian strikes.

On November 1, Zelensky said about 40% of Ukraine's energy infrastructure had been damaged as a result of the strikes, leading to mass blackouts throughout Ukraine.

Russia has intensified strikes on Ukraine's military and energy infrastructure since October 10, two days after the bombing of the Crimean bridge, which Moscow blamed on the Ukrainian special services.

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Zelenskyy Invites UN Expert Mission to Examine Ukraine's Critical Infrastructure

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Pentagon Says Concerned by Escalating Actions in Turkey, Syria, Calls for De-Escalation
WASHINGTON, November 24 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense said in a statement that it is concerned by the recent escalating military actions in northern Syria, Iraq and Turkey due to the threat they pose on the efforts to defeat the Islamic State terror group (outlawed in Russia).

"The Department of Defense is deeply concerned by escalating actions in northern Syria, Iraq, and Turkiye," the statement said on Wednesday. "Immediate de-escalation is necessary in order to maintain focus on the defeat-ISIS [Islamic State] mission and ensure the safety and security of personnel on the ground committed to the defeat-ISIS mission."

Turkey's recent air strikes in Syria threatened the safety of US personnel working with local partners in the battle against the Islamic State, the statement said.

The United States condemns the loss of civilian life in both Turkey and Syria as a result of the recent military actions, the statement also said.

Washington will continue to discuss the maintenance of ceasefire arrangements with Turkey and the local partners, the statement added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 24 (Sputnik)

CSTO SUMMIT

* Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on Wednesday that during the Collective Security Council of the Organization (CSTO) summit he refused to sign the Declaration of the Collective Security Council of the Organization.

* The conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan was discussed during the CSTO summit in Armenia, the work on the settlement is difficult, but it will continue, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

* Putin briefed his colleagues at the CSTO Collective Security Council in Yerevan on Wednesday As to developments amid Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Peskov said.

RUSSIAN ENERGY SECTOR

* Gas production in Russia decreased in January-October by 13% year-on-year to 474 billion cubic meters, and in October by 20.3% year-on-year to 45.7 billion cubic meters, Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) said on Wednesday.

* Russia's liquefied natural gas (LNG) output in January-October 2022 increased by 10.6% year-on-year to 26.9 million tonnes, in October the indicator increased by 1.2% year-on-year to 2.8 million tonnes, Rosstat said.

* Russia's oil production, including gas condensate increased by 2.5% month-on-month to 45.3 million tonnes in October and the average daily oil production slightly decreased by 0.8% to 10.71 million barrels; and in January-October oil production was up 2.4% year-on-year to 443 million tonnes, Rosstat said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* All nuclear power plants in Ukraine and most of the thermal power plants and hydroelectric power plants were temporarily de-energized on Wednesday, the country's energy ministry said.

* The new \$400 million defense drawdown for Ukraine authorized by US President Joe Biden includes additional munitions and air defense equipment, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

* The shutdown of the power units of the South Ukrainian NPP is connected with the destruction of the power grid, the condition of the station is fine, Ukraine's state-owned nuclear energy company Energoatom said.

* Explosions are heard in different parts of the Ukrainian capital, Kiev Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

TURKEY RAIDS IN SYRIA

* Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley and Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces Gen. Yasar Guler discussed “several items of mutual strategic interest” following Turkish air-raids in northern Syria against Kurds in the recent days, Joint Staff spokesperson Dave Butler said on Wednesday.

* Turkish airstrikes in Syria earlier this week posed a risk to US forces in the region, a US Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson told Sputnik.

* At the talks in Astana, Russia tried to convince Turkey to refrain from conducting an operation, which could lead to an escalation in the entire Middle East, Russian special presidential envoy for Syria, Alexander Lavrentyev, said.

* Damascus will take all measures to protect its territory and ensure security, Syrian Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ayman Susan said, commenting on Ankara's operation in northern Syria.

POWER OUTAGE IN MOLDOVA

* Russian Ambassador to Chisinau Oleg Vasnetsov was summoned to the Moldovan Foreign Ministry, a source in the Moldovan foreign ministry told Sputnik on Wednesday.

* Electricity supply in Moldova has been restored for all residents of the north and 90% of consumers of the center and the south of the country, Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Spinu said.

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UN Deeply Concerned About ‘Reckless, Deplorable’ Shelling of ZNPP –Under Secretary General

UNITED NATIONS, November 24 (Sputnik) – The United Nations is deeply concerned about the “reckless and deplorable” shelling of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP) over the weekend, United Nations Under-Secretary General Rosemary DiCarlo said during a UN Security Council meeting.

“We also remain deeply concerned about the situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest in Europe. The reported shelling at the plant over the weekend is reckless and deplorable,” DiCarlo said on Wednesday.

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Majority of Fed Policy Makers Think Time to Slow Interest Rate Hikes: Meeting Minutes

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - A majority of Federal Reserve officials behind this month's US interest rate hikes thought it was time to slow down the pace of monetary tightening, according to the minutes of their meeting held at the beginning of the month and released on Wednesday.

"The minutes of the November 1-2 Fed policy meeting show that a substantial majority of participants thought a slowing in the pace of interest rate hikes would be appropriate soon," the Fed's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) said.

The minutes were the clearest sign yet that the Fed was ready to slow the interest rate hikes after carrying an intensive acceleration over the past seven months to cool inflation.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, expanded by 7.7% during the year to October, growing at its slowest pace of in nine months after peaking with a 9.1% increase during the 12 months to June.

The drop came after relentless interest rate hikes by the Fed, which has added 375 basis points to the rates since March from a starting point of 25. Nevertheless, inflation remains more than three times higher than levels preferred by the Fed, which has vowed to get to its 2% target.

After the four straight interest rate hikes of 75 basis points between June and November, markets have signaled they expect the Fed to impose a smaller increase of 50 basis points at its upcoming rate decision on December 14.

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UN Security Council Anti-Terror Resolution Must Be Implemented Effectively - Russian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, November 23 (Sputnik) - The United Nations resolution on countering terrorism must be implemented effectively given that the Islamic State (outlawed in Russia) and other terror groups are present in Afghanistan and are expanding in Central Asia, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the world body Anna Evstigneeva said on Wednesday.

"We believe that it is particularly important to effectively implement the UN resolution on the anti-terrorist sanctions regime against ISIL [Islamic State] and al-Qaeda," Evstigneeva said during a UN Security Council meeting.

Russia sees an active presence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan and continuing expansion of jihadists in Central Asia, Evstigneeva added.

The Russian diplomat said a top priority will be to expand the UN Security Council sanctions regime to cover individuals and organizations that are members or linked to the Islamic State branch in Afghanistan.

On October 26, Russian President Vladimir Putin said international terrorist groups are trying to infiltrate the CIS countries and the level of danger from threats in the region is not decreasing. The spread of foreign mercenaries with combat experience also poses a threat to them, Putin added.

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US Justice Dept. Seeks to Question Ex-Vice President Pence in Capitol Riot Probe - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department is seeking to question former Vice President Mike Pence as part of its probe into the January 6 Capitol riot, The New York Times reported on Wednesday.

Federal prosecutors are looking to question Pence as a witness in connection with its criminal probe into former US President Donald Trump's alleged efforts to remain in power following the 2020 election, the report said, citing two people familiar with the matter.

Pence is open to considering the request, unlike the inquiries of the House January 6 investigatory committee, the report also said, citing people familiar with the former vice president's thinking.

However, Trump could try to invoke executive privilege to prevent or limit Pence's testimony, the report said.

The House panel investigating the January 6, 2021 riot at the US Capitol held a number of public hearings on their findings, one of which focused on Trump's alleged attempts to pressure Pence into delaying certification of election results in favor of Joe Biden.

Talks about questioning Pence are in early stages, and a subpoena process could take months, the report said.

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US Military Likely Behind Dozens of Fake Facebook, Instagram Accounts - Meta

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - A network of Facebook and Instagram accounts were likely run by people associated with the US military and focused on audiences in a number of countries, including Russia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Syria among others, media giant Meta (banned in Russia as an extremist organization) said in a new report.

"We removed 39 Facebook accounts, 16 Pages, two Groups, and 26 accounts on Instagram for violating our policy against coordinated inauthentic behavior," the report said on Tuesday. "[O]ur investigation found links to individuals associated with the US military."

This network originated in the United States and focused on a number of countries including Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Somalia, Syria, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Yemen, the report added.

The operation of the fake accounts ran across multiple internet services, including Twitter, YouTube, and Telegram, as well as Russia-based VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, according to the report.

In September, Meta announced that it took down 1,600 fake accounts for allegedly spreading Russian propaganda about the situation in Ukraine. Also in September, Meta took down 81 Facebook accounts, eight Pages, one Group, and two accounts on Instagram that were allegedly related to China.

Russia designated Meta as an extremist organization on March 21 after the social media giant selectively lifted its rules to allow Ukrainians to call for violence and use hate speech against Russian "invaders," including calls for the death of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

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Justin Trudeau Meets Belarusian Opposition Leader in Ottawa - PMO

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reaffirmed his support to Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as they met in Ottawa on Wednesday, his office said in a statement.

"Today, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met with the Belarusian Opposition Leader, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Prime Minister Trudeau reaffirmed Canada's support for the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people and called for an end to the Lukashenko regime's continuing human rights violations and efforts to silence dissent," the Prime Ministers' office statement read.

According to the statement, Trudeau and Tsikhanouskaya condemned Russia's ongoing special military operation in Ukraine, and the "support" given by Belarusian President Aleksander Lukashenko's, to Moscow.

Both expressed their desire to further cooperate in the area of human rights in Belarus, the statement added.

On November 22, the Canadian government announced it was imposing new sanctions against entities and individuals from Belarus who "facilitate and enable" Russia's military operation in Ukraine.

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US Crude Oil Stockpiles Drop 2nd Week in Row as Refiners Boost Fuel Inventories - EIA

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US crude stockpiles fell for a second week in a row as refiners stepped up fuel production, leading to large builds instead in gasoline and distillate inventories, data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA) showed Wednesday.

Crude inventories fell by 3.7 million barrels in the week to November 18, adding to the previous week's decline of 5.4 million, the EIA said in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report.

Refinery runs rose by almost 1% last week to 94% of capacity last week, hitting record highs in the key US East Coast region and boosting inventories of both finished gasoline and blending component products.

Gasoline stockpiles rose by 3.1 million barrels versus a build of 2.2 million the previous week and against expectations for a 383,000-barrel rise. The drop accentuated the 10-year lows in gasoline stockpiles in the East Coast, traders said, reflecting the tight supply situation for America's premier automobile fuel in one of the nation's busiest markets.

Distillate stockpiles, which include diesel and heating oil, rose by 1.7 million barrels, versus expectations for a 550,000-barrel drop. In the previous week, distillate inventories rose by 1.12

million barrels. Distillate refined into diesel for trucks, buses, trains and ships as well as fuel for jets.

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US Could Soon Approve Chevron to Expand Venezuelan Oil Operations - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The United States could soon approve Chevron Corporation to expand operations in Venezuela to help bolster the country's oil production, Reuters reported on Wednesday.

The US could approve Chevron to vastly expand their Venezuelan oil operations as early as Saturday, once the government and opposition resume political talks, the report said, citing three people familiar with the matter.

US authorization for Chevron to help rebuild Venezuela's oil industry was one of the biggest plums for initiating talks between the Venezuelan government and their opposition, the report said.

Earlier this month, sources told Sputnik that the Biden administration is looking at Venezuela as an additional source for crude oil amid global energy market volatility, but has no intention of a blanket lifting of sanctions.

The US hopes to lower gasoline prices for US consumers following production cuts made by the Saudi-led OPEC+ group to stabilize the global market, the source said.

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Potential US Rail Strike Could Cost Economy \$1Bln in First Week if Not Averted - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - A potential freight rail strike due to failed labor negotiations could cost the US economy \$1 billion in the first week unless averted, CNN reported on Wednesday.

The first three days of a strike could cost the economy a quarter billion dollars due to the disruptive nature of such an event, the report said, citing a new analysis from the Anderson Economic Group (AEG).

"Economic impacts caused by a national railroad strike include lost wages for the industry's workers and production slowdowns due to non-delivery of critical components in some vulnerable industries," the AEG analysis said as quoted in the report.

Impacted industries could include ethanol, retail and agriculture, the report said.

Rail unions are threatening to begin a strike on December 9 unless a deal is reached with carriers on issues such as rates of pay and benefits.

The Biden administration is directly engaged with parties in the negotiations, the White House said.

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Joint Coordination Center Chief Steps Down, Deputy Becomes Acting Officer in Charge - UN

UNITED NATIONS, November 23 (Sputnik) - The coordinator of the Joint Coordination Center, Amir Abdalla, has stepped down from his post and deputy coordinator Ben Parker will be the acting offer in charge, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Wednesday. "The coordinator for the Black Sea Initiative Amir Abdalla is stepping down due to personal reasons. His deputy, who is Ben Parker, will be acting as officer in charge in Istanbul for the time being," Haq said during a press briefing. On July 22, Russia, Ukraine and Turkey signed an United Nations-brokered agreement to provide a humanitarian maritime corridor for ships exporting food and fertilizer from Black Sea ports, including the Ukrainian ports of Odesa, Chornomorsk and Yuzhne. The JCC in Istanbul is responsible for coordinating the movement of ships exporting grain and fertilizer via safe Black Sea corridor as per the agreement. The grain deal was extended last Wednesday prior to expiring on November 19.

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Syrian Kurds in Letter to Biden Say US Must Aid Allies, Halt Turkish Attacks

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Kurds on Wednesday wrote an open letter to US President Joe Biden in which they emphasized that the United States must support its allies and halt Turkish attacks in northern Syria. On Sunday, Turkey conducted an air operation in northeast Syria. "As a US citizen, I am shocked and embarrassed that the United States would fail to shield its allies from these attacks," the letter said. "These allies gave 11,000 martyrs to defeat ISIS [Islamic State, outlawed in Russia] and protect the world from terror. Will the great United States truly support democracy in the Middle East, or continue to support authoritarianism?" The letter urged the United States to come to the aid of its allies and halt what it characterized as "Turkish violence" by any means necessary. The letter, obtained by Sputnik, was written by Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) Representative in the United States Bassam Saker. Saker said the Turkish Air Force has over the past several days conducted ferocious aerial bombardments against the Syrian people and the country of Syria as a whole in violation of international law. "They targeted not only the people of northern Syria and its Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), but other points in Syria, and now a base affiliated with US train-and-equip forces battling ISIS

[Islamic State]," Saker said. "This base lies adjacent to the Had US military base, which contains US assets and frequently houses diplomats and US personnel."

Saker pointed out that the SDF are staunch partner forces of the United States and have been risking their lives in the fight aimed to defeat Islamic State terrorists.

"The SDF became a US ally and the United States told us that we would stand together as partners. When the former administration called for the withdrawal of US troops from Syria in October 2019, you tweeted a message that called for the United States to support the SDF and its allies," the letter said. "Now, the United States has stepped aside and allowed these attacks to occur, violating years of partnership."

Saker noted in the letter that several SDF soldiers have been killed as well as two special forces trained by the United States.

"The United States should never treat its allies so carelessly," the letter said. "Where is the condemnation of the United Nations and the international community? Right now, we hear only silence. This can only be interpreted as a tacit support for this Turkish aggression."

Saker noted that the entire world sang the praises of the SDF when it was fighting the Islamic State and pushing back the black tide of dangerous extremism.

"Now that these same troops are under attack, where are the voices who so easily spoke of them before?" he asked.

Saker also said that Turkey has displayed how dramatically it has drifted away from democracy and embraced authoritarianism.

"In attacking a base that held soldiers of the US-led Coalition to Defeat ISIS, Turkey is acting in flagrant violation of its NATO principles," the letter said. "By attacking [the area] near the US military base, they demonstrate what little respect they have for the country, what little belief they have that the United States will retain its leadership on the global stage. Turkey reveals that its true allegiance is elsewhere, not with the United States or democracy."

Earlier on Wednesday, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said that the army intends to clear the northern Syrian regions of Tall Rifat, Manbij and Ayn al Arab of Kurdish militants.

A US Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson told Sputnik on Wednesday that the Turkish airstrikes in Syria earlier this week posed a risk to US forces in the region.

The United States previously said the Turkish strikes did not pose a risk to US forces, according to media reports.

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Ship With Russian Fertilizers Headed to Malawi to Depart This Week - UN Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, November 23 (Sputnik) - The first ship of Russian fertilizers did not depart Monday from the Netherlands to Malawi as initially predicted - but is still on schedule to be shipped this week, UN Spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Wednesday.

"The ship did not leave on Monday. That departure is going to happen from the Netherlands this week, but just a bit later," Haq told a briefing.

The World Food Program has chartered the ship and the United Nations will try to provide more details once it passes, he added.

On November 18, The secretary general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Rebeca Grynspan, that the first shipment of Russian fertilizers would be sent from the Netherlands to Malawi via Mozambique on November 21.

At the same time, the UNCTAD head stated that shipments of these fertilizers would soon be expanded to other African nations in need, adding that there were now over 300,000 tonnes of fertilizers blocked in EU ports.

Before the deal's expiry on November 19, Russia threatened to not extend the agreement because it saw no results in terms of exports of its own products - grain and fertilizers - onto the global markets.

The grain deal was renewed for another 120 days last Wednesday. It is part of a UN- and Turkey-brokered package agreement that unblocks exports of Ukrainian and Russian grain and fertilizers in the Black Sea.

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Syrian Kurds Seek Diplomatic Contacts With Damascus - SDC

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Kurds are seeking to have diplomatic contacts with Damascus, which do not exist at all at the moment, however, the communication at a military level is proceeding very well, Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) Representative in the United States, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.

Russian special presidential envoy for Syria, Alexander Lavrentyev, said on Wednesday that the Syrian Kurds and representatives of the Syrian government held meetings, and it was possible to work out certain decisions. Lavrentyev expressed hope for the continuation of such contacts between the Syrian Kurds and Damascus.

"We would like to have diplomatic contacts with Damascus, and have made requests and attempts to reach out to the authorities. However, up until now we have not received any response from them," Saker said. "Our military contacts are very good and beneficial."

The United States backs Kurdish armed groups in Syria despite protests from Damascus. The US military currently controls parts of the provinces of Al-Hasakah, Raqqqa, Aleppo and Deir Ez-Zor, where the largest Syrian oil and gas fields are located.

The Syrian government does not recognize the so-called autonomous administration of northern and eastern Syria, and calls the presence of the US military on its territory an occupation and its theft of Syrian oil - state piracy.

The armed conflict in Syria has been ongoing since 2011, with various insurgent groups, including terrorist organizations, fighting the Syrian Army to oust the government of President Bashar Assad. In late 2017, the Islamic State (terrorist group banned in Russia) was declared defeated in Syria and Iraq, but counterterrorism mop-up operations are still underway.

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Syrian Kurds Hear Only 'Silence' From US, UN on Turkish Attacks - SDC

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The Syrian Kurds are only hearing silence from Washington and the UN after Turkey's airstrikes in Syria, Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) Representative in the United States, Bassam Saker, told Sputnik.

On Sunday, Turkey conducted airstrikes targeting Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its military wing, People's Defense Units (YPG), in Syria. According to the Turkish Defense Ministry, a total of 89 targets were destroyed during the operation.

"Where is the condemnation of the United Nations and the international community [and] even Washington? Right now, we hear only silence. This can only be interpreted as a tacit support for this Turkish aggression," Saker said.

Saker said the strikes targeted Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Syrian army.

"They are targeting the Syrian infrastructure in the area. The world is seeking to have stability in the area but these attacks are breaking the stability and worsen humanitarian issues," he added.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday that the army intends to clear the northern Syrian regions of Tall Rifat, Manbij and Ayn al Arab, also known as Kobani, of Kurdish militants.

A US Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson told Sputnik on Wednesday that Turkish airstrikes in Syria earlier this week posed a risk to US forces in the region.

The United States previously said the Turkish strikes did not pose a risk to US forces, according to media reports.

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UNSC to Hold Emergency Session Later on Wednesday on Ukraine's Request - Russian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, November 23 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will hold an emergency session later on Wednesday at the request of Ukraine, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Wednesday.

"Today, the Ukrainians, frightened by our attacks on infrastructure facilities, requested an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council," Polyanskiy said. "Mr. [Volodymyr] Zelenskyy was again announced as a speaker from Ukraine by video link in violation of the rules of procedure of the Security Council."

The Russian diplomat said Ghana, which presides over the UN Security Council for the month of November, has scheduled the meeting for 4:00 p.m. (21:00 GMT), however, it has not yet announced its decision on the admission of Zelenskyy.

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New \$400Mln US Drawdown Aid for Ukraine Includes Anti-Air Missiles, Generators - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The new \$400 million drawdown for additional aid to Ukraine includes surface-to-air missiles and 200 generators to assist Kiev after a series of Russian air strikes on the country's energy infrastructure, the US Defense Department said on Wednesday.

The drawdown package, authorized by President Joe Biden earlier on Wednesday, includes National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), more than 100 light tactical vehicles and over 200 generators, the Defense Department said in a statement.

"With Russia's unrelenting and brutal missile and [drone] attacks on Ukrainian critical energy infrastructure, additional air defense capabilities remain an urgent priority," the statement said. The United States has committed more than \$19.7 billion in security assistance to Ukraine by the Biden administration and more than \$21.8 billion since 2014, the statement said.

The United States will continue to work with its allies and partners to provide Ukraine with key capabilities to meet evolving battlefield requirements, the statement added.

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US Imposes New Sanctions on 3 Iranian Security Officials - Treasury

(Updates to with more details, background in paras 1, 3-6; adds quote in para 2)

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on three Iranian security officials for participating in their government's ongoing crackdown on nationwide protests, most recently in the Kurdish areas of Iran, the US Treasury Department said on Wednesday.

"The Iranian regime is reportedly targeting and gunning down its own children, who have taken to the street to demand a better future," the Treasury Department said in a press release. "The abuses being committed in Iran against protesters, including most recently in Mahabad, must stop."

Protests erupted in Iran after 22-year-old Mahsa Amini died of a heart attack while in the custody of Iran's Morality Police in September for an alleged hijab violation.

The response by the authorities in the Kurdish cities in northwestern Iran has been described by some residents as particularly severe.

The three officials sanctioned include Hassan Asgari, governor of Sanandaj, the capital of Kurdistan province; Alireza Maradi, the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) commander in Sanandaj; and Mohammad Taghi Osanloo, an Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRCG) commander who oversees the West Azerbaijan province, the release said.

The IRGC and LEF are alleged to have stifled free speech in Iran through excessive use of force, extrajudicial killings, torture, denial of medical care and enforced disappearances of unarmed protesters, the release added.

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US Border Personnel to Detain Dominican Sugar Products Made by Central Romana - CBP

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US border personnel will detain sugar products made in the Dominican Republic by the Central Romana Corporation Ltd. due to the possible use of forced labor in their operations, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said on Wednesday. "Effective November 23, 2022, US Customs and Border Protection personnel at all US ports of entry will detain raw sugar and sugar-based products produced in the Dominican Republic by Central Romana Corporation Limited," CBP said in a statement.

CBP explained that it has issued a withhold release order against Central Romana based on information that reasonably indicates the use of forced labor in its operations, the statement said.

CBP identified five of the International Labor Organization's 11 indicators of forced labor during its investigation, including abuse of vulnerability, withholding of wages, abusive working conditions and excessive overtime, the statement added.

The withhold release order demonstrates CBP's commitment to protect human rights and international labor standards and promote a fair and competitive global marketplace, according to the statement.

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US Lawmakers Concerned Over Surge in Number of Chinese-Made Drones Incursions – Reports

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) – US lawmakers have been sounding the alarm over a surge in Chinese-made recreational drones flying into restricted airspace over Washington, D.C. in recent months, Politico reported on Wednesday, citing administration officials in the know. Over the past 45 days, more than 100 drone incursions have been registered by federal agencies in Washington, D.C. restricted areas with Chinese company DJI being the most common manufacturer of the drones, the report said.

DJI drones can be easily hacked by users to bypass "geofencing" restrictions as in the case of Washington, D.C., according to a government contractor cited in the report.

At the same time, the officials cited in the report do not believe the drone incursions are somehow directed by the Chinese government, in contrast to what some of the lawmakers think on the issue.

“Any technological product with origins in China or Chinese companies holds a real risk and potential of vulnerability that can be exploited both now and in a time of conflict,” the report cited senator Marco Rubio, vice chair of the Intelligence Committee, as saying in an interview.

DJI responded by noting that the manufacturer cannot control the end users and denied any financial ties to the Chinese government, according to the report.

There are more than 870,000 drones registered on the United States with estimates this number will increase to 2.3 million by 2024, according to the data collected by the Federal Aviation Administration.

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US Weekly Jobless Claims Hit August Highs, Boosting Chance for Fed Rate Hike Pivot

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US jobless claims hit their highest levels since August last week, from near historically low levels of unemployment in the week prior, according to Labor Department data on Wednesday that appeared to bolster the chance of the Federal Reserve tapering its rate hikes to cool inflation.

Some 240,000 people applied for unemployment benefits last week, up by 17,000 from the week before, the Labor Department said in its weekly jobless claims report, which was released a day ahead of its typical schedule due to Thursday's Thanksgiving Holiday.

Economists polled by US media had anticipated jobless claims to rise by just around 13,000 last week.

“It is quite a big jump in the claims data for the current week,” economist Greg Michalowski said in a post on the ForexLive forum. “It will be interesting to see if this is the trend rather than the exception going forward, but the short term trend is to the upside since the last cycle low during the September 24 week.”

The four-week moving average of claims, which smooths out week-to-week volatility in unemployment data, rose by 5,500 to 226,750.

Joblessness among Americans reached an all-time high of 14.8% in April 2020, with the loss of some 20 million jobs after the COVID-19 breakout. Since then, the Labor Department's non-farm payrolls report has reported hundreds of thousands of job additions every month. The national jobless rate has remained for almost a year now at below the 4% level that the Fed defines as maximum employment. US average hourly earnings have also risen without stop since June 2021.

The Fed has a particularly tough job in trying to balance jobs growth with inflation since ensuring maximum employment and inflation at below 2% a year are its twin targets.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, expanded by 7.7% during the year to October, growing at its slowest pace of in nine months after peaking with a 9.1% growth during the 12 months to June. The drop came after relentless interest rate hikes by the Fed, which has added 375 basis points to rates since March, from a starting point of just 25. Despite such an aggressive campaign, inflation remains more than three times higher than levels preferred by the central bank, which has vowed to get to its 2% target.

Runaway inflation had prompted the Fed to add 375 basis points to rates since March. Prior to that, rates peaked at just 25 basis points, as the central bank slashed them to nearly zero after the global COVID-19 outbreak in 2020.

After four straight jumbo-sized hikes of 75 basis points between June and November, markets expect the Fed to impose a smaller increase of 50 basis points at its upcoming rate decision on December 14.

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Ukraine, IMF Reach Tentative Deal on Economic Policy Oversight Program - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Ukraine reached a tentative deal to implement an economic policy oversight program to put Kiev on track towards a full-fledged program with the financial agency, the IMF said on Wednesday.

"The mission and the Ukrainian authorities have reached staff-level agreement on economic policies for a Program Monitoring with Board Involvement (PMB)," the IMF said in a statement. Ukrainian authorities requested a four-month PMB to support their economic program, anchor macroeconomic policies and pave the way to a full-fledged IMF program, the statement said. An IMF mission held virtual talks with Ukraine from November 11-22 to discuss the key elements of their program, the statement said.

The PMB will help provide an anchor for macroeconomic policies and catalyze donor support, the statement said.

The agreement is subject to approval by IMF Management and an IMF Executive Board discussion, expected to take place in the coming weeks, the statement added.

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New \$400Mln US Drawdown for Ukraine Includes Munitions, Air Defense Equipment - Blinken

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The new \$400 million defense drawdown for Ukraine authorized by US President Joe Biden includes additional munitions and air defense equipment, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

"This \$400 million drawdown includes additional arms, munitions, and air defense equipment from US Department of Defense inventories," Blinken said in a statement.

The drawdown is the twenty-sixth authorized for Ukraine since August 2021, bringing US military aid to Ukraine to approximately \$19.7 billion since the start of the Biden administration, the statement said.

The US will continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes, so that Kiev can be in the "strongest possible position" at the negotiating table when the time comes, the statement added.

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Turkish Airstrikes in Syria This Week Posed Risk to US Forces in Region - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Turkish airstrikes in Syria earlier this week posed a risk to US forces in the region, a US Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson told Sputnik on Wednesday.

The United States previously said the Turkish strikes did not pose a risk to US forces, according to media reports.

"We have received additional information that there was a risk to US troops and personnel," the spokesperson said.

On Sunday, Turkey conducted an air operation against militant bases of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its military wing, People's Defense Units (YPG), also labeled as a terrorist organization in Turkey. According to the Turkish Defense Ministry, a total of 89 targets were destroyed during the operation.

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US, Turkish Top Generals Discuss 'Items of Mutual Strategic Interest' After Raids in Syria

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley and Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces Gen. Yasar Guler discussed "several items of mutual strategic interest" following Turkish air-raids in northern Syria against Kurds in the recent days, Joint Staff spokesperson Dave Butler said on Wednesday.

"Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley spoke with Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces Gen. Yasar Guler today by phone. The two leaders discussed several items of mutual strategic interest," Butler said in a statement.

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US Imposes New Sanctions on Three Iranian Nationals – Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury imposed sanctions on Wednesday on three Iranian nationals, according to a release.

They include Hassan Asgari, governor of Sanandaj, the capital of Kurdistan province; Alireza Maradi, a Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) commander in Sanandaj; and Mohammad Taghi Osanloo, an Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp brigadier general.

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Canadian PM Condemns Twin Bomb Attacks in Jerusalem

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Canadian PM Justin Trudeau condemned the two bomb attacks in Jerusalem that left a Canadian teenager dead on Wednesday.

"Canada condemns this violence in the strongest possible terms," Trudeau stated on Twitter. He also acknowledged the deceased Israeli Canadian victim, "sending his family and friends my deepest condolences."

Both attacks occurred at bus stops on the outskirts of Jerusalem on Wednesday, killing 16-year-old student Aryeh Shtsupak and injuring 14 other people.

Israeli media reported that both bombs contained nails and were likely detonated remotely. It is unclear who was behind the attack.

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Biden Authorizes Drawdown of \$400Mln in US Defense Aid for Ukraine - Memorandum

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Wednesday authorized Secretary of State Antony Blinken to direct the drawdown of up to \$400 million in defense aid to Ukraine, according to a memorandum shared by the White House.

"By the authority vested in me as President ... I hereby delegate to the Secretary of State the authority under [the Foreign Assistance Act] to direct the drawdown of up to \$400 million in defense articles and services of the Department of Defense, and military education and training, to provide assistance to Ukraine," Biden said in the memorandum.

The Biden administration has vowed to continue providing support to Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation in order to put them in as favorable a position as possible for any future negotiations.

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Biden Directs Federal Officials to Provide Assistance in Chesapeake Shooting – White House

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden on Wednesday directed federal officials to provide assistance to people affected by the mass shooting at a Walmart in Chesapeake, Virginia, according to a release.

"We are grateful to the first responders who mobilized to assist victims, and I have directed federal officials to provide any support and assistance needed to the people of Chesapeake," Biden said in the release. He added that "greater action" was needed on gun reform. Police said the gunman in the shooting was a Walmart employee who shot six people dead and wounded four others before killing himself.